Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00369 282005Z
ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
----------282007Z 093864 /46
O 281725Z JAN 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 2861
INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T BEIRUT 0369

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, SY, IS, LE, US
SUBJECT: ASF DEPLOYMENT IN SOUTHERN LEBANON

REF: STATE 019280

1. I CALLED ON PRESIDENT SARKIS AT 1700 JAN 28 AND CAREFULLY WENT OVER ORAL TALKING POINTS PARA ONE REFTEL. PRESIDENT SARKIS' IMMEDIATE RESPONSE WAS THAT DEPLOYMENT OF ASF SOUTH FROM JAZZIN WAS NOT JUST A QUESTION OF COLLECTION OF HEAVY ARMS BUT OF PROTECTING THE CHRISTIAN VILLAGES. PEOPLE LIVING THERE HAD BEEN AFRAID TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES AND REFUGEES AFRAID TO RETURN. HE HAD BEEN UNDER EXTREMELY HEAVY PRESSURE FROM THE MARONITE PATRIARCH AND OTHER CHRISTIAN LEADERS TO PUT A STOP TO THE DEPREDATIONS OF THE PALESTINIANS IN THIS AREA. IT WAS "UNTHINKABLE" AND UNBELIEVABLE" THAT THE ISRAELIS SHOULD REACT SO VIOLENTLY TO THIS LIMITED DEPLOYMENT OF THE ASF. HE REPEATED THAT LESS THAN ONE BATTALION WAS SPREAD ALONG THE ROAD FROM JAZZIN TO NABATIYAH, ONLY A "HANDFUL" OF ASF TROOPS WERE IN NABATIYAH ITSELF,
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AND NABATIYAH WAS AT LEAST 14 KILOMETERS AS THE CROW FLIES FROM THE ISRAELI BORDER. IT HAD NEVER OCCURRED TO HIM THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD REACT SO STRONGLY. HIS INTENTION HAD BEEN SIMPLY TO PROVIDE SOME SECURITY FOR THE INHABITANTS OF THIS REGION.

2. I REPLIED THAT IT WAS APPARENT FROM NEWSPAPER AND RADIO

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REPORTS THAT NABATIYAH HAD A SPECIAL SYMBOLIC IMPORTANCE
AS FAR AS THE ISRAELIS WERE CONCERNED. I THEN REFERRED TO
THE ISRAELI CABINET MEETING ON SUNDAY AND ASKED HOW SOON I MIGH
HAVE HIS RESPONSE TO THE ISRAELI REQUEST FOR A DATE AND
TIME-TABLE BY WHICH THE ASF UNITS WILL BE WITHDRAWN. SARKIS
REPLIED THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO DISCUSS THIS QUESTION WITH
HIS COUNCIL OF MINISTERS WHICH MEETS ON MONDAY AND SAID HE
COULD NOT GIVE ME AN ANSWER BEFORE MONDAY AFTERNOON LOCAL
TIME.

3. IN THE ABSENCE OF COL. AL-HAJJ, WHO HAS BEEN PRESENT
MOST OF MY PREVIOUS MEETINGS WITH SARKIS,
THE PRESIDENT WAS NOT ABLE TO GIVE ME ANY INFORMATION
ON THE ALLEGED MOVEMENT SINCE TUESDAY OF SOME ASF
PERSONNEL SOUTHEAST OF NABATIYAH. (COMMENT: IF THIS
IS A REFERENCE TO THE PRESENCE OF ASF FORCES AT KAFR
TIBNIT, COL. AL-HAJJ TOLD ME PREVIOUSLY THAT THIS
VILLAGE WAS ENTERED AS PART OF THE INITIAL MOVEMENT
OF THE ASF FORCES SOUTH FROM JAZZIN, IN ORDER TO CUT
THE ROAD FROM NABATIYAH TO MARJAYUN, AND WAS COMPLETED
BY TUESDAY, JAN 25. END COMMENT.)

4. I ALSO REPEATED THE USG DESIRE TO BE HELPFUL IN
PREVENTING ANY DESTABILIZING DEVELOPMENTS IN THE
REGION AND SAID THAT IN THE PRESENT ATMOSPHERE, EVEN
THE SMALLEST MOVEMENT OF ASF TROOPS FURTHER SOUTH COULD
CAUSE MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND CREAT TENSIONS. SARKIS
NODDED HIS UNDERSTANDING AND AGAIN ASSURED ME THAT NO
SUCH MOVEMENTS WOULD BE MADE WITHOUT PRIOR CONSULTATION
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WITH US.

5. COMMENT: SARKIS CERTAINLY GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF
BEING COMPLETELY SINCERE IN HIS PROTESTIONS THAT HE HAD
NO INTENTION OF SPRINGING A "SURPRISE" ON EITHER US OR
THE ISRAELIS BY ORDERING THE ASF SOUTH FROM JAZZIN. HE
REPEATED HIS ASSERTION THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THE ISRAELIS
WERE SENSITIVE ONLY ABOUT AN ASF MOVE TO TYRE, OR
THROUGH MARJAYUN. IN LIGHT OF THE EVENTS OF THE PAST
WEEK, HOWEVER, SARKIS CAN NOW HAVE NO DOUBT ABOUT
ISRAELI SENSITIVITY TO EVEN THE SLIGHTEST SOUTHWARD
MOVEMENT OF THE ASF.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
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Subject: ASF DEPLOYMENT IN SOUTHERN LEBANON
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